



## City of Lynn Police Department

Kevin F. Coppinger  
Chief of Police

300 Washington Street, Lynn, Massachusetts 01902-4718 (781) 595-2000 Fax (781) 477-7069

Leonard E. Desmarais  
Deputy Chief of Police

Elizabeth A. Polonsky  
Confidential Assistant

Michael A. Mageary  
Deputy Chief of Police

October 20, 2014

The Honorable Janet L. Sanders  
c/o Massachusetts Attorney General  
One Ashburton Place  
Boston, MA 02108

### Re: Union Hospital

Dear Justice Sanders:

As I'm sure you are aware, Partners Healthcare, parent company of North Shore Medical Center, has announced plans to consolidate its medical and surgical services at its Salem Hospital location while converting Union Hospital in Lynn into a behavioral health facility. I am writing to you in my role as Chief of Police for the City of Lynn to express my concerns on the probable impact to public safety in our city. These concerns are threefold as follows:

#### 1.) Impact on Police Resources Having to Respond out of our Jurisdiction

Lynn, a city of over 91,000 people, is an active community in terms of calls for service to its Police Department. On the average, we respond to over 75,000 calls annually and often times these involve incidents where individuals are injured and in need of medical care. Unfortunately, many of these incidents are crimes of violence. Police officers are routinely dispatched to Union Hospital for follow up investigations where they interview victims and/or witnesses to a variety of incidents. Proper medical care comes first, hence our responses to the hospital instead of conducting those interviews at the scene of the original response. If the Union Hospital Emergency Department should close, or if patients are routinely diverted to out of town hospitals, our officers would be travelling outside our jurisdiction, most likely to either Salem Hospital or Massachusetts General Hospital. Both of these locations present significant logistical problems, i.e. increased response time should we need to call the officers back to the city for other emergencies, jurisdictional issues in terms of police powers in another community, etc. With the active call volume that we have, keeping our officers accessible is a top priority for the department. Closing the Emergency Department, or limiting its services as I understand the present plan to be, will seriously impact that accessibility.

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## 2.) Impact on Converting Union Hospital to a Behavioral Health Facility

I will be the first to admit that the need for improved behavioral health services is a must in today's society. From my research and conversations with police chiefs across the country, it appears that the percentage of our nation's population in need of mental health services has exploded over the last few decades. It also appears that the number of individuals in main stream society on prescription medication for mental health related issues has followed in similar fashion. Locally, one of our most frequent calls is for the service of Section 12s, the "Pink Papers". These calls take up a significant portion of our workload. While it could be argued that I am making the case for Partners to proceed with their conversion, my point is two-fold. Yes, they should, because I agree the need is there but; No, the proposed location presents too many negatives. Please let me explain.

Union Hospital is located in a mostly residential area closely surrounded by private homes. Directly across the street is a nursery school and kindergarten. An elementary school as well as a public park and playground are only a few blocks away. While it might be true that once patients are "locked down" in a unit these concerns are diminished, I would argue that the facility will attract individuals who want to "self-admit" at the door. These are the individuals that create much anxiety and concern amongst the neighbors and we often respond to calls such as these in that immediate area. And when you keep in mind that other hospitals will be transferring their psych beds to Union, I expect these calls to increase. We have already experienced this phenomenon in a different but somewhat similar track. Over the years, several social service agencies have opened facilities in Lynn to treat clients with substance abuse problems. We have found these clients have come from many communities outside the greater Lynn area. Our experience has shown us that they are attracted to Lynn because of these services, but many either are not eligible to participate or they are asked to leave the programs for a variety of reasons. When this occurs, many do not return to their home communities. Even the ones that successfully complete their programs often stay here upon discharge. Unfortunately, many of these individuals then engage in criminal behavior, etc. While I acknowledge I am certainly not an expert, it is my understanding that there is a general consensus amongst the experts in the field that many people suffering from substance abuse problems also suffer from mental health issues and vice-versa. If Union Hospital ceases to exist as a medical facility and converts to strictly a behavioral health hospital, my fear is that crime will increase and the quality of life in our neighborhoods will diminish. A behavioral health facility, the size of what is being proposed here in Lynn, does not belong at the Union Hospital site. I would strongly recommend a more suitable location be found that will not have such an adverse impact on the neighborhood.

## 3.) Loss of a full service medical facility

Many people have presented arguments, and rightfully so, against the closing of Union Hospital as a medical facility. For the sake of brevity, I will not repeat them here but as a resident of this city I do agree that Lynn needs to have a full service hospital. One can argue that these services will be shifted over to other local facilities and/or providers but the fact is there will not be a full service hospital in a city of 91,000+ residents. From the police perspective, the Emergency Department at Union is a busy place, 24 hours a day/365 days a year. Will these

other facilities have the ability to maintain a proper level of care? What will be the impact on patient volume/care at other hospitals should the Emergency Department eventually close, as most people think will happen eventually? I ask you to look at this issue carefully. Personally, I have my doubts. Proper medical care needs to be provided to people when they need it and where they need it. The citizens of our city deserve a well-managed, efficient, and full service medical facility in our community.

Thank you for your time.

Respectfully,



Kevin F. Copping  
Chief of Police

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